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ABSTRACT

This paper probes the challenges of a white feminist instructor in teaching a course, "Native North American Indian Literatures: An Introduction," at the University of North Carolina (UNC)-Charlotte. A teacher's major audiences are typically one's students and one's peers, the tenure and publication audience. However, multicultural teaching has other audiences as well, such as the communities addressed in the teaching. The UNC-Charlotte English Department's multicultural policy is essentially additive rather than inclusive: a few new staff, a few new offerings. Because the instructor is not part of the culture about which she teaches, she enlisted the aid of American Indian colleagues outside the university in designing the course. Components of the course include community service, attendance at a pow-wow, a journal, a research paper, and Indian guest speakers. The instructor found pressures from critical colleagues within the institution, who perceived multicultural teaching as lacking intellectual rigor. Various requests for travel pertaining to enhancing the course were denied. The instructor believes that a multi-cultural advisory board should be set up for the university in the community. Students seemed indifferent to the fact that a non-Indian was teaching American Indian material. The instructor observed a lack of activities and services for American Indian students on campus. A commitment to multicultural education should include the community of study as an audience of peers. (KS)

# One's Peers or 'the People?'

## Audience(s) in Multi-Cultural Teaching

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# One's Peers or "The People"?

## Audience(s) in Multi-Cultural Teaching

"I learned that Indians had a bad rap and that they can write. Big deal!"

"The course changed my life, and I think it should not just be a choice for an English major, rather an absolute [graduation] requirement."

At a time when multi-cultural course offerings are under attack, many of us whose very life-work (as opposed to a career, in the conventional job-ladder-to-success understanding) are finding our energies sapped by the diversity vs. quality debate. Reading anything from graduation addresses by the "Education President" to our professional Bible, "The Chronicle," one would think that universities and their curricula have been overcome by "political correctness;" the values of Western "civilization" (sometimes, to my mind, a contradiction in terms) have been tossed into a historical dustbin. Rather than engaging in a debate characterized not by the genuine exploration of alternatives, but rather by false oppositions, I would rather, in this paper, using my course Native North American Indian Literatures: an Introduction, probe some of the challenges which it uncovered, and which remain largely unresolved. Far from having taken over, multi-cultural teaching is in its infancy; multi-culturalism is a buzz and snarl word, not a reality. If it were, the diversity versus quality debate would not exist; it would serve no one's purposes.

## Audience(s) in Multi-Cultural Teaching

Elsewhere I have discussed pedagogical implications of non-Western literatures; in this paper, my focus is professional and community relations.[1]

Of course, when one is a teacher, one's students are the primary audience. Traditionally, this statement would be so obvious as to be banal. Teachers teach students (subject-verb-object; from higher to lower), almost unilaterally.[2] The other major constituency is "one's peers," the tenure and publication audience.

But multi-cultural teaching has other audiences as well. The odyssey I sketch here will focus on introducing the study of American Indian literatures at a mainstream white, Southern university, UNC-Charlotte, after being denied the opportunity to teach them for two years running at Marquette University; the former head of its English Dept. regarded this subject as "eccentric and irrelevant, of no interest to undergraduate teaching." When hired at UNCC to teach exactly what I wished to teach--and where Am. Indian literatures can fulfill the American Literature requirement for the major, as African Am. and Jewish Am. literatures can--one might think that, like Odysseus, I was home at last. Instead, the journey has only just begun.

Formulated in October, 1983, and revised in January, 1989, the English Dept.'s multi-cultural policy reads as follows:

Audience(s) in Multi-Cultural Teaching

We, the faculty of the UNCC English Dept. in accord with our belief that literature and language both reflect and shape culture, affirm the importance of representing in our courses the complementary contributions of both sexes and also of diverse cultural perspectives.

"We, therefore, adopt the policy that:

a) we will make a genuine effort to appropriately include both men and women, as creators and critics, in our course curricula;

b) we will make a genuine effort to include works representing the various cultural perspectives appropriate to each course;

c) we will make a genuine effort to heighten, in any works we teach, our students' awareness of tendencies to stereotype differences in culture, religious beliefs, gender, class, age, race and sexual orientation, and will at the same time encourage understanding of the above differences.

Just who the "we" of the document are is in flux (and who is *its* audience, apart from our captive students?). The department is slowly changing from a wholly conventional American and British curriculum. It now offers such courses as Post-Colonial Literatures in English, Post-Colonial Women's Writing, Pan-African Literatures, and Multi-

Ethnic US Women's Writing. In addition to the two Black female professors who pioneered the "browning" of (very few of) the traditional courses, two new positions were recruited last year: my own (advertised as "Third World," but which I altered to "post-colonial"), and Prof. doris davenport's. I was assured when interviewing that the African American professors were by no means confined to the literatures of their communities, but that is very largely the case. Their energies are also absorbed by teaching voluntary sections of composition for African American students only. As the rhetoric of the policy implies, it is essentially aoditive: a few new staff, a few new offerings. The "we" (since most of us who "specialize in diversity" were not here in the 1980s) begins to sound like the "We the people" in another exclusionary document; and it is "we" who do the acting upon.

One of my first concerns was: what is the role of a teacher dedicated to introducing literatures from communities/cultures of which she is not originally a part? Should she? Throughout the course planning my experience as a Western- -formed feminist in various post-colonial and/or non-Western societies (Southern Africa, China, Papua New Guinea) served as a guide. Western feminism, in race, class and culture-bound forms, can be as imperialist an import as Coke, white sugar, and foreign diseases. A teacher venturing into post-colonial territory must be willing to examine her own presuppositions, her relationship to the culture which produced her. Above all, she must be willing to listen, which often means: to shut up. Thus, when work-

ing with or teaching about women from other cultures, the relationship cannot be directive; it is dialogic, relational.

Moreover, my conception of a teacher (and this would include Shakespeare, Chaucer, or eighteenth-century British literature courses as well) has to do with enabling and mediating, not with constituting final authority. As a firm believer and member of coalitions and networks, it did not occur to me to design "Native North American Indian Literatures: an Introduction" entirely by myself. This was done with the help of a Lumbee colleague in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools, Rosa Winfree, Coordinator of American Indian Education, *and* with Nay Howell, Coordinator of Minority Achievement Programs. From the start, none of us regarded the course as confined to "Indian" materials; they became simply a specific instance of multi-cultural teaching.

We built in a community service dimension: my students formed a Speakers' Bureau to present "Indian" materials within the public schools, and received academic credit for so doing. (When the course is next offered, we are considering a mentoring relationship between my students and Ms. Winfree's.) Attendance at the pow-wow of the United Indians of North Carolina was mandatory. So were constant, conceptual-critical journalling, and a research paper. Members of the Charlotte Indian community were guest-speakers within the course, as was an African American.

This tactic was once dismissed as "your houseniggers and cigar store Indians," which was profoundly insulting, less to myself than to my colleagues, who are fully capable of making their own decisions. They understand the elitist university framework for what it is, and welcome the chance to address its audiences/fora; the classroom is turned over entirely to them. The days of native informants and collaborators are over; my guest-friends, like myself, simply feel that complete separation from the mainstream/"malestream" society is impossible, and try to influence institutions through their politic participation within them. Not for a moment, though, do any of us think curricular change equals social change, or will guarantee it. Or, as Jonathan Jansen argues, "Curriculum change is more a reflector than a generator of social change or development." ("Curriculum Policy," in Mokubung Nkomo, ed., *Pedagogy of Domination* 330) In other words, the "quality versus diversity" debate may be addressing curricular change, as a Southern expression has it, "bass-ackwards." In its present state(s), multi-cultural education risks cooptation and domestication. It in no way represents, as its detractors fear, reverse colonization of the canon; the aim of multi-cultural education is to enlarge and share, not to oppress in turn.

It became clear, however, that having a multi-cultural policy and teaching a single, elective, third-year course (with an impossible brief, generically and culturally) do not in any way change the institution. Indeed, it is more likely that those who are committed to multi-culturalism serve the institution while taking a number of

risks as far as research (presented, of course, in conferences like this one to "one's peers"), promotion, and tenure are concerned. Simply to add a course to the university catalog within a pre-existing framework accomplishes little except, perhaps "maintenance of the status quo through incremental improvements in existing curricula" (Jansen, 327). Instead, the framework has to be rethought. Otherwise ghettoization and marginalization will increase, and mainstream teaching will be unaffected.

Sadly, multi-cultural teaching may be perceived as marginal and unimportant, a concession to keep women and visibly ethnic students quiet. Their intellectual rigor will be questioned. If one is a white middle-class woman, moreover, the old white boy network may well treat her as a dissident daughter of the patriarchy who is easier to chastise than a visibly ethnic colleague. Anger which colleagues feel helpless and afraid to vent at, say, African American women may well be addressed to oneself; or, as I have found as a white feminist in the South, indulgently patted on the head for interests no longer perceived as "eccentric" but as potentially "unacademic." Incidents such as the following began to rear their ugly heads, leading me to reconsider whether the present system of academic rewards, itself a product of European university systems, is appropriate to professional multi-cultural activities.

* Dept. travel money: as a non-Indian, I wanted, of course, to consult with American Indian colleagues at a neighboring state univer-

sity, historically an "Indian school" before desegregation. The object of the visits was to liaise with Indian academics and plan for more institutional cooperation in future. Would I be speaking to my "peers"? Not unless I give a formal academic paper. Travel request initially denied. (In contrast, my request to present a paper at a conference on West Indian literature--enormously more expensive, in the Caribbean--was supported.)[4]

* Having taught both *Black Elk Speaks* and *Lame Deer: Seeker of Visions*, as well as having read all I could about these texts, I wanted to spend the summer, not studying Beckett's personal library in Dublin, for example, but attending the Lakota Summer Institute at Sinte Gleska College in South Dakota. My "peers" most certainly would not be there, since I would be a pupil. Request denied, also because such an activity is not regarded as "research."

* Having attended an NEH/Newberry Library workshop on oral literature the preceding year (and benefitting so much that it would be inconceivable to teach about oral cultures without it), I was invited to attend the next workshop, on sacred texts. The university contributed the $200. that NEH asks for the previous year, but there has been a change of chair, and this request was, again, initially denied. As can be imagined, much energy was consumed in these requests and defense of them; energy better spent *elsewhere*.

As these incidents forced me to rethink conventional definitions of one's "peers" and other appropriate professional relationships, Rayna Green's description of the import of her academic credentials for (in her case) the Western Cherokee immediately came to mind. Yet, if analogous, our situations are not identical. On behalf of her people, she has become a figure in the mainstream; on behalf of people who are not "mine," I find myself also facing two directions, but *from* the mainstream:

> Leadership for us is not achievement in the normative mainstream sense. That I have a doctorate makes not a damn bit of difference in Indian country. That I ever write a line makes no difference. What makes a difference for me, and for all the other native women...is what we give to our communities. If I never do a thing that counts in this forum...if I never do these things again, it won't matter to me or to my community, if I have not done what is demanded and expected of a person with real leadership ability in my community, which is to give to it....Degrees, lists of achievements, high-powered jobs, the wearing of power suits--I look ridiculous in one--are nothing. What counts is how much we give. And how much we are a part of the community....This creates difficulties for us in the mainstream world. Because very often our notions of credibility and our notions of how we will be evaluated and judged in that world don't match with the other world....Our achievements on

> paper, our jobs, our awards, our grades...our civil-service ratings, our chairmanships...are roles of leadership that can count for nothing in our communities if they do not translate back to good health and survival for Indian communities, and so that makes for a difficulty. With someone like me, I write, and I write for myself, primarily. But when I write and publish, if that publication has no use in Indian communities or in the communities to which the publication is directed...I feel a failure. And yet in the scholarly world, such a utility is the last thing that is valued. Service--service publications, service jobs, you know, all those of you in academia, you understand this--are not valued, but in our communities they are deeply valued. What I do with my scholarship has got to work for people...[What I do] cannot be for someone who is my 'supervisor.' It cannot be for someone who is my boss. It has to be for other people, or it does not work for me. It has to work for Indian people and it has to work in those communities....The credit counts, the names count. I love seeing my name in print--we all do...[But] It is in fact the message and not the author which is validated in the Indian community ("American Indian Women: Diverse Leadership for Social Change", in *Bridges of Power*, 68-71).

Who, then, *are* the audience(s) for multi-cultural teaching? Students initially and then "one's peers", criteria worked out in rela-

tion to a traditional curriculum? Who has authority to "review" and "evaluate" multi-cultural teaching, when the subject matter is not a long-oead writer, but very living people? People who are neighbors, with whom we live? When "research" may lead as naturally to a reservation or a tribal college as to a library, tho' it does not exclude the latter? Where participation at a pow-wow, or a festival of Native writers, co-exists with conference hotels? Where "sustaining" professional development involves creating and maintaining reciprocal, egalitarian relationships with "the people"?

The more I explored the paradox of a non-Indian "teaching" Indian materials to a largely non-Indian audience, I began to think: my true extra-university audience is the people whose literatures are being taught. I am above all accountable to them. They are not specimens and cannot be dissected. They must know who I am and what I am doing, as well as feeling free to contribute to the course(s). I do not want to be the literary equivalent of an archaeologist colleague who offered credit for a dig in Cherokee Country without consulting with the local Cherokees. In short, I want neither my scholarship nor my career to be at others' expense.

Such considerations have led me to think that a multi-cultural advisory board should be set up for the university in the community. This suggestion makes most of my colleagues wary since, they say, I could lose my academic freedom, and certainly my objectivity, if I treat Indians not only as peers but as, indeed, elders.[5] Since

"academic freedom" frequently seems as oxymoronic as "military intelligence" or "college education," I then ask: who is in fact censoring here, the academic community or the Native community? Which is the more likely to cooperate, participate, mediate and share? This is not to reject "my peers," who can be met at any academic conference, but to enlarge their population. The either-or thinking exemplified in my title is not characteristic of tribal societies, and Western norms of classification and evaluation (polarized; hierachical) cannot adequately recognize or reward those whose primary commitment is to multi-cultural teaching. The latter I regard as truly inclusive: African Americans or American Indians need not be confined to their own cultures, and neither need Euro-Americans. Ethnic belonging, under most circumstances, is a plus, but our students also need models of people who cross cultures, not only in their reading, but in their daily lives.

From the first day of the course, I raised the question of whether and how a non-Indian should teach American Indian materials. This, of course, raised the further question of whether multi-cultural teaching should be ethnically distinct, either in its teachers or its student population. I expected students to feel short-changed; instead, they seemed indifferent. Then, at a conference panel on multi-cultural pedagogy, Prof. davenport stated categorically: "Your course would not be as popular if taught by an American Indian." I asked students to journal about this. By this stage of the semester, they knew the value I put on honesty. Some

said what their teacher wanted to hear--that they would leap to take a course taught by an Indian. One white, male student wrote: "Actually I was a little disappointed, at first, that this course wasn't taught by a Native American. Obviously, no offense, Ms. G., you're a kook and take this course *seriously*, not as part of your job, but as part of you. This was apparent after the first two or three sentences on the first day. That's what matters to me: how much does the teacher care as well as know?"[6]

But other patterns emerged: some thought an Indian would be like an Asian professor or TA, speaking inadequate English (as they think); some white students were emphatic that a personable Indian would be all right, BUT: and then recounted their "minority" experiences in Afro-Am. Studies classes. Accepting "minority" anger, or simply a focus on different cultures, makes them defensive. Interestingly, a difference in cultural allegiances may be expressed as gender hostility. A Black female colleague was physically threatened by a white male student who accused her of reverse discrimination; in a survey of story-telling worldwide, a student wrote in the open-ended evaluation: "Dr. Gardner looks like she buys her clothes off the African American rack at K-Mart. This Sixties dinosaur should be extinct." Although such attitudes can be received as back-handed compliments, all four of us who "specialize in diversity" are women, and, apparently, perceived as women first, not professors who are also women. That there is diversity within diversity is scarcely

acknowledged: we are perceived as a bloc, perhaps all the more threatening because we are female?

I then thought back to the hiring game last year: of the three candidates for the post-colonial position, two were Caribbean women. I was told I was hired because of my interest in pedagogy (which the chair later made clear does not lead to tenure), but began to suspect that I was, indeed, hired as a "safe" white person. A feminist colleague on the affirmative action committee later stated that the deciding factor was my American birth. But the result of many happy, productive years--half my lifetime, the adult half--in the "Third"/First World is that, as the chair of the campus Black faculty caucus put it, I cannot be depended upon to do the "white" thing. My consciousness has become off-color and extra-territorial, a "foreign insider's" or a "native outsider's". As Paula Gunn Allen demonstrates so ably in her introduction to *Spider Woman's Grand-Daughters*, Western society has a horror of mixing, whether of race, gender, or genre. To which I would add that we are not teaching in universities, as we should be doing (better still: pluriversities), but in monoversities. This is again made clear by our multi-cultural teaching policy, which is clearly additive but not truly inclusive. In the Southeast, moreover, despite the presence of Southeast Asians, American Indians and Hispanics, cultural differences are still conceptualized in literal Black-white terms; hence, I suspect, the hostility of many to the Lumbee Indians, who are racially mixed but have clung to their Indian identity.

This observation introduces another audience, entirely absent: the 86 American Indian students at a campus of 14,000+. UNCC does not present a particularly welcoming campus climate for them, insofar as special recruitment and retention activities are addressed to African American students primarily. There is no American Indian counselor, nor is there a student organization. Yet North Carolina has the highest concentration of Indians east of the Mississippi; the indigenous Lumbee are the largest Federally-unrecognized tribe in the country. In future, I shall contact all self-identified American Indian students individually, so that they at least know that the course exists, leaving to them whether they wish to be involved in any way.

Nor do I intend to forget the audience with whom I began: students at a predominantly white, mainstream university who need to encounter "other" cultures on terms different from trivialization, romanticism, and exoticism. That an American Indian should be hired goes without saying; without any desire to eliminate myself as interpreter or bridge, I cannot envisage such courses taught in future unless in partnership.

Finally, there is the audience for this document, which I construe as anyone interested in multi-cultural teaching, with access to the educational resources in which it appears. In arguing for an expanded definition of "peers," not necessarily of academic status although including them, I hope that a new community will form, one

that includes "the" people, rather different from the "we" in the document with which I began. This community, unlike so many others, will not be confined by ethnicity, gender, or class. As with "sisterhood," its unity-within-diversity must be achieved, not assumed. If the personal is the political, this is a case of the professional being both. When I asked Ms. Winfree what a non-Indian friend of Indians would be like, she said without hesitation, "First that you understand us, then that you make a commitment to us." Together, those of us forming the new tribe of multi-cultural teachers will be able to evolve curricula, teaching techniques, and programmatic changes which will make future initiatives less reactive and more pro-active. And, unlike the national debate in which arguments are presently taking place, this will not be about defending privileged sets of interests. The future of a truly multi-cultural society can only come about through reciprocal dialogue, on which my concept of peers as partners rests.[7]

## NOTES

1. See my "Imperialism Begins at Home: Canonization and Colonization," presented at the Philological Association of the Carolinas, Charlotte, March 1991, for discussion of including culturally sensitive practices and values in multi-cultural teaching. Nothing, for example, could be further from traditional American Indian learning--via imitation, repetition and participation--than the passive, formal lecture format. My third paper will concern institutional and programmatic transformations.

2. Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, of course, thoroughly explains his "banking concept" of education.

3. I should stress here that I regard UNCC as in no way atypical; rather, representative of many state institutions with a commitment to diversity, but not yet with the substance. This paper is one outcome of many conversations with colleagues.

4. A further irony: Pembroke State University has recently decided to "mainstream" itself, its administrators being convinced readers of Bloom and Hirsch. Colleagues there have been wishing themselves in my place (being "allowed" to teach Indian and post-colonial materials)! There, the American Indian and Lumbee Indian (as well as African Am.) literature courses do not fulfill a general education graduation requirement, nor do they count for the English major.

5. In a post-apartheid Southern African context, Mokubung Nkomo states that "committed research and scholarship...must eschew neutrality and detachment where the human condition demands drastic amelioration--a scholarship that is catalytic and cathartic is imperative" ("Post-Apartheid Education: Preliminary Reflections," in *Pedagogy of Domination*, 303). The essays in this volume are by no means regionally limited; by implication and extension, a liberatory education in South Africa could provide a model for our own attempts to end discrimination in our education systems, in all aspects. As Nkomo defines multi-cultural education in South Africa, it would

"fairly represent the contributions of all cultures in South Africa in a fair and just manner while it unambiguously promotes the formation of a unitary national democratic culture. It should go beyond the mere juxtaposition of cultural practices. It must move toward the transformation of the old paradigms and correlation of power relations." (305) The new "common national identity [would be] "attended by a cooperative cultural diversity." (316)

6. Imafedia Okhamafe's "How to Teach In-Class Conflicts of Values," presented at the fifth annual MELUS conference at the Univ. of Minnesota, 13 April 1991, similarly addressed a pedagogy of caring knowing, of intelligent feeling.

7. Cf. this statement by Bakhtin concerning Dostoyevsky, which appears on the course syllabus: "The consciousness of other people cannot be perceived, analyzed, defined as objects or as things--one can only *relate to them dialogically*. To think about them means to *talk with them: otherwise they immediately turn to us their objectivized side;* they fall silent, close up, and congeal into finished, objectivized images," qtd. in Emily A. Schultz, *Dialogue at the Margins: Whorf, Bakhtin, and Linguistic Relativity*, 77).

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